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## REVIEWS AND NOTICES

**Sister Mary of St. Philip. 1825-1904.** By a Sister of Notre Dame.  
New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920. 2 Vols.

Blessed be the instrument—book, music, picture, landscape, stretch of sky, sound of voice, clasp of hand—that even in late middle age lets one

“recapture  
The first fine careless rapture”

of the enthusiasms of one's youth.

Such an instrument will be for thousands of readers, the *Life of Sister Mary of St. Philip*, now given to an expectant host of friends and admirers by a Sister of Notre Dame who was privileged to work with her over forty years. This almost anonymous biographer, has not only intimate knowledge of her subject, adequate materials to select from, but also a charm of literary style and a sense of values which make her work a treasure-house of precious memories and a life-like portrayal of a character such as God gives not twice to any country in a century. We think the book will stand the sharp test of satisfying all friends and admirers of both subject and author.

Sister Mary of St. Philip was one of the most prominent figures in the world of Catholic education in England in the second half of the nineteenth century. For nearly fifty years she was engaged in the work of training teachers at Mount Pleasant College, Liverpool, which she founded in 1856. His Grace, the Archbishop of Liverpool, says of her in his Introduction:

“It is well—lest Catholics forget—that one aspect of the life of Sister Mary of St. Philip should be emphasized, and it is this: To her, and with her we identify the Training College, Mount Pleasant, of which she was for nearly fifty years the life and soul, is due in large measure the present numerical strength of Catholics in England. And it may be justly claimed for her that in the greatest crisis through which the Catholic Church

has passed since Catholic emancipation she was the one person given to us by Divine Providence to enable the Church to exist and to flourish in this land."

High praise, indeed; but even in the cold print of a life-record one feels its truth; how faithfully is it echoed by the thousands who can say on reading.

"All of which I saw, and part of which I was."

Frances Mary Lescher, Sister Mary of St. Philip, was born in London, May 8, 1825, of Alsatian and Swiss ancestry, though both father and mother were natives of England. Traditions of faith and loyalty to Church and State were a proud inheritance, to which William and Mary Lescher added a noble share. Of the seven children born of their union, two daughters became Sisters of Notre Dame, two others entered the Order of St. Benedict, and one son, Edward, became a priest, and, later, joined the Oblates of St. Charles, at Bayswater.

Frances and her sister Annie, only a year younger, were sent to school at Newhall after their mother's early death. In two years Frances had finished the course of studies there and taken the gold medal, the highest distinction awarded. The Canonesses advised her father that it was useless to leave her longer at school. Both girls, therefore, came home, and from that time continued their studies under their father's guidance. Three delightful chapters tell the story of their home life, their social and parish activities, and their first continental travel, the prime objective being a visit to their brother William, who was in the Seminary at Fribourg. The quotations from letters and journals show unusual powers of observation in girls so young, and intelligent appreciation of music, art, and social conditions in France, Germany, and Switzerland. The strict, if loving, father could be a perfect companion to his lively daughters.

Then came the call of Christ, to Annie first, who entered the Novitiate of the Sisters of Notre Dame, at Namur, Belgium, in 1850, and in due time made her profession there as Sister Mary of St. Michael. Frances followed her there three years later, after a hard struggle with her own heart to leave the dear father and younger brothers and sisters to whom, as eldest daughter of the house, she had been so dear and neces-

sary. She received the habit of Notre Dame, with the name of her choice, on September 17, 1853, and in the September of 1855 she made her vows.

Her great life work was waiting for her. Six months before, Mr. T. W. Allies, as Secretary of the Catholic Poor School Committee of England, had visited the Reverend Mother-General at Namur to lay before her a proposal that the Sisters of Notre Dame should undertake the foundation and direction of a training school for Catholic school-mistresses in England. The conditions were hard—State examination for the nuns, large expenditure, much publicity—but, on the other hand, it was the work of predilection of Blessed Julie Billiart, the education of the children of the poor, the saving of their faith by the saving of the Catholic schools. So Mother Constantine, great daughter of a great foundress, accepted the proposal and agreed to begin at once the erection of new and suitable buildings at Liverpool, where the Sisters had opened both a boarding school and a middle school in 1851.

Just one month after her profession, October 17, 1855, Sister Mary of St. Philip returned to England with three companions to begin the great undertaking. Even her friends, much as they esteemed her, little dreamt of the work she was destined to accomplish for Catholic education.

It is to show forth this accomplishment that this Life has been written; obeying the injunction of the Psalmist: Let these things be written for another generation: And the people that shall be created shall praise the Lord.

Sister Mary of St. Philip and her companions lost no time in beginning their immediate preparation for the teacher's certificate examination. All were successful in obtaining it, three of the four being named in the first division. The examiners praised all the work, and especially Miss Lescher's whose essay on *Mediaeval Architecture* they pronounced to be "more fit for a quarterly review than for an examination paper."

On the Feast of the Purification, 1856, twenty-one young girls were gathered together in the largest room of the Provisional Training College to hear Sister Mary of St. Philip's opening lesson on *Our Lady*. The biographer tells us, and we can well believe, there was a peculiar fragrance about the early days of

the college, as is so often the case in the beginning of a great and noble enterprise, conducted by a capable and sympathetic leader. And this was the beginning not only of the college, but of the very business for which the college had been created. Hence there was a sense of pioneership in both teachers and taught, which stimulated courage and enthusiasm and fostered the spirit of fraternity; hence, too, an ever present and sustaining ideal of a spiritual mission. Sister Mary of St. Philip had breathed a spark of her own apostolic fire into the hearts of her students; she fanned it into flame by her conferences and exhortations, and yet more by her example.

In December, 1858, the first band of students obtained their teacher's certificates. They were so brilliantly successful in the examination that Mr. (afterwards Sir) Francis Sandford, Chief Secretary of the Education Department, wrote a personal letter of congratulation to Sister Mary of St. Philip. As he learned to know her better his admiration of her intellectual and administrative powers increased. "Miss Lescher", he once said, "is a woman who might fearlessly place her hand on the helm of the State". (Government officials seem never to have recognized the nuns' religious names.)

There were two periods of crises in the history of Catholic elementary education in England. For about thirty years the Catholic voluntary schools had had a few miserable grants doled out to them. In 1863 the Revised Code established the principle of payment by results in elementary schools. The extension of the same system to training colleges involved considerable modification in their financial position, thus giving serious cause for apprehension as to their future upkeep. Panic seized upon the managers of Catholic schools, and they lifted up their voices to protest against connection with the State. Sister Mary of St. Philip thought, with the Catholic Poor School Committee, that Catholics could not afford to give up State aid. But let it not be thought that either she or they ever upheld the principle of "payment by results". They felt it was essentially an evil, though a less one than the risk of having to close their schools.

The crisis passed. Sister Mary of St. Philip redoubled her vigilance and her zeal. She lost no opportunity of warning her students against the danger of looking upon their pupils as

grant-earning machines, and she implored them not to measure success by the number of "passes". "I know one teacher", she laments, "whose children all pass in reading, writing, and arithmetic, but the manager comes to me in despair about their lack of religious knowledge. That is not success. It is failure, and very bad failure. I hope none of you will seek success of that kind". Happily such cases were few.

A far greater crisis than that of 1863 was caused by the Education Act of 1870. To many the passing of that bill seemed the death-knell of Catholic ideals in education. For the Conscience Clause relegated religious instruction and observances to stated times: the beginning and end of each of the two daily sessions. The ground of fear was the theoretic boundary line drawn by the bill between religious and secular education. No Catholic so draws the line; but had Catholics assumed a *non possumus* attitude with regard to the bill, elementary education would have passed almost entirely out of their hands. By accepting aid from the State, they could hope to keep pace with schools built and maintained from the public taxes; while the conscience clause left the whole tone and atmosphere of their own schools essentially Catholic. No one was more alive than Sister Mary of St. Philip to the dangers of the bill, and she constantly pointed them out to students and teachers, urging caution and generosity, while rejoicing in the opportunity of teaching Catholic truth to the future men and women of England.

A long chapter of the book "On His Majesty's Service", is given to outlining the more important changes in elementary education in England during the long years in which Sister Mary of St. Philip guided the destiny of Our Lady's Training College; and in showing, successfully indeed, the wisdom and prudence of her action. Perhaps this is best epitomized in the words of the devoted chaplain of the college, the Rev. T. J. Welshe, who wrote thus to her: "If I may anticipate what will be said of you in time to come, I feel it will be this—that whilst you were ever most careful to be on the high side, to use your strength and influence for the safeguarding of the Faith and Virtue, you were at the same time broad and generous in your view, with the result of a far greater increase of God's glory and the

strengthening of the bonds of charity". To this high tribute the biographer adds that it describes one who spent all her powers, all her talents, nay, her very self, in extending Christ's Kingdom on Earth. In the noblest sense of the phrase, her life was passed "On His Majesty's Service".

Would that this review might include some of the precious words and significant anecdotes which make up the chapters entitled: Education for Life Eternal; A Great Teacher; College Days and College Ways; Sunshine and Shower. They must be read in their entirety "for human delight". It cannot even touch upon the record of growth and expansion necessitated by the thousands of teachers who have been trained within the walls of Mount Pleasant; nor, unfortunately, of the great religious, who, during seventeen years as Superior of the house, guided a large community in the path of perfection. Sister Mary of St. Philip had never been so great an educationist if she were not so holy a religious. It is under this double aspect that her beloved co-laborer and biographer has succeeded admirably in portraying a powerful and charming personality.

S. M. P.

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**The I. W. W. A Study of American Syndicalism.** By Paul Frederick Brissenden, Ph.D. New York: The Columbia University Press, 1920. Second Edition. 432 pages.

It is a remarkable tribute to the author of this book that the first edition received favorable reviews from both the "capitalistic" and the radical press of Butte, one of the storm countries of I. W. W. activities. Another indication of the completely objective and unbiased character of the volume is that the *Nation's* book reviewer declared that it lacked strong human interest, while the man who reviewed the book for the *Review* said it was too colorless. Dr. Brissenden spent more than 10 years in gathering material and writing the book. The result is a work which deserves in a high degree the characterizations, unbiased, adequate, and scholarly.

The sub-title gives one indication of the comprehensive manner in which the author has done his work. For the book is not